FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is to encourage and support a spiritual orientation to life, to promote the practice of prayer, meditation, and service to others, and to help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind.

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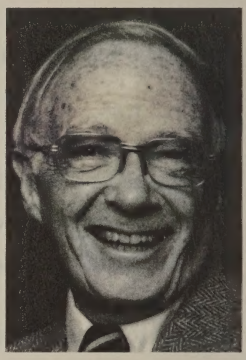
Cover photo by Robert F. Campbell



If you have access to a computer, and to the world wide web, I hope you can explore Fellowship in Prayer's web site (http://www.fip.org). It opens up a spacious and enthralling view of the spiritual life and its rewards as lived by men and women of every condition, country, and faith tradition.

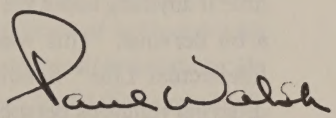
To me, the most exciting--thrilling is not too strong a word--aspect of this awesome new way of reaching out to people is that there are now an estimated 30 million men and women around the globe who have access to the world wide web and who use it every day. Most of them have never heard of Fellowship in Prayer. *All* of them--at one time or another--urgently feel the need to drink from the well of spiritual wisdom, insights, gratitude, and sacred experience that is available in the pages of *FiP* and at its new web site. The potential for "helping all sentient beings" has never been greater.

The human race is in the process of an evolutionary leap to a higher consciousness that truly understands the cosmic truth that we are all interrelated, all interconnected in a web of mutual love and interdependence. This fact is reflected on the screens of countless millions of computers the world over. This intricate, interconnected network has the potential to create a worldwide spiritual community of men and women of every race, country, and spiritual tradition; people of good will and good hearts who believe, with Thomas Paine, that "All the world is my country and all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion." The Dalai Lama said much the same: "My religion is kindness."

How can such words on a computer screen, or on a printed page for that matter, help bring about a heightened consciousness of who we are and that our mission is to love God and to serve one another? The fact is that thoughts can have a presence and a power that draw us to embody and act on them. Socrates said that "to know the good is to do it." The words of Mother Teresa or the Dalai Lama arouse in us a deep homesickness for our true self, for the joy and peace and loving-kindness that is at the

sacred heart of our own divinity. We don't have to be mystics to know God.

Theologians assure us that our souls can have an abiding relationship with the divine without being consciously aware of God's presence within us. As the noted scholar Huston Smith says, the goal is not altered states but altered traits. For many of us, words--on a computer screen or on the printed page--are most often the starting point on the path to an active realization that our own growth and well-being are rooted in, and inseparable from, that of the whole world. □



Paul Walsh

I claimed one of the last seats in the circle of chairs. A few of the thirty or so gathered were easily labeled--the priest by his clerical collar, the Muslim women by their modest garb, the rabbi by his yarmulke. Most of us were unrecognizable as friends of God from our dress or demeanor. Across the room I waved to the Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Williamson, a trustee of Fellowship in Prayer--the one who had invited me to attend this interfaith gathering. I knew little if anything about the other attendees and was both quite curious and a bit nervous. This was, after all, the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life.* Scholars and erudite religious professionals from differing religious perspectives filled the room. Viewing them through the lens of a reporter, I began looking for handles, categories, and quotables--the things from which stories are written. I also wondered how we would find common language from diverse traditions--so that we might hear each other rather than create distance.

My questions were refocused by Rabbi Peter Ochs when he stood, front and center, lit a candle, and gently exhorted that to build intimacies "first we do, then we think." As with religious ritual, we enact the rites and upon later reflection the fuller meaning breaks through. Each of us was to stand and briefly share an image of religious intimacy--a personal icon or window--to our experience of the divine. Rabbi Ochs held up a musical triangle as the instrument to keep us brief and to mark the passage from one story to the next.

Image followed image, each like a gleaming pearl strung one after the other: an aunt's kitchen table where one's thoughts were welcomed; a friar's habit as a sewn representation of the cross; a loaf of bread in a soup kitchen; the faces of sleeping children; rippling waters that seem to say "glory to God" in each movement; lying on the grass and experi-

**For more information on The Association for Religion and Intellectual Life contact Charles P. Henderson, Jr., Executive Director, College of New Rochelle, New Rochelle, NY 10805-2339.*

encing what later was understood as the Hasidic view of God in each moment; a grandmother who affirmed a child's earliest transcendent questions by saying, "Yes, it looks like the trees are reaching for God."

These and other homey images were interspersed by starker views--like precious black pearls on the strand of wisdom. One woman best experienced God beyond images in "no-thingness." A man knew God mostly, during a period of pain, as absence, yet another was pointed toward God in the bereft cry of a female eagle separated from her mate.

When each had shared, I slipped from the room filled with a deep sense of holy encounter. When I rejoined the group the next morning, I still did not know people's names, yet I knew each as a seeker of God. No longer was that man best defined as a professor at such-and-such university or that woman as the director of such-and-such association. He was the man who lived by lists and music and thus found the prayer book and hymnal as holy gifts. She was the one who took off her shoes and took the posture of a student at the feet of God. We gathered again, not religious professionals or scholars, but as those beloved by God--seekers all.

In this issue of *Fellowship in Prayer*, you will find many additional images of divine encounter. Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins introduces us to Hadisic wisdom sayings that show "It's the details, the small daily things" we must learn. Mardi McCabe imagines God as a "bright blue light." A flock of geese offers divine assurance to Nan C. Merrill. Rose Mary Dougherty meets a little boy in her dreams who points the way. Helen Luke remembers the life of Bede Griffiths. Praying the Ordinary is Richard J. Foster's focus, while "sistering" is Rose Tillemans'. Master Hsu-Yun teaches the imageless way, "to put down all entangling conditions, let not one thought arise." "Finally," a poem by Sarah Elizabeth Rose rends our hearts through a moment of divine exchange.

As you read imagine yourself as one in a circle of God's friends. For truly, you are. □

Rebecca Laird

Rebecca Laird

A Cyberchat with Dov Peretz Elkins

In a time and place where suffering reigned, a spiritual master declared that the way to fight sadness is with joy. Israel Bal Shem Tov, eighteenth century Jewish rebbe from Eastern Europe's Carpathian Mountains said, "The man who looks only at himself cannot but sink into despair, yet as soon as he opens his eyes to the creation around him, he will know joy."

This founding voice in Hasidism told his followers that a simple prayer offered in sincerity held as much value as a great mystical incantation, that fervor in one's breast outweighed profound and complex thoughts. Perhaps his appeal to simplicity and heart-felt spiritual action accounts for the longevity of his message. Recently Dov Peretz Elkins, spiritual leader of The Jewish Center of Princeton, New Jersey, gave a talk based on his book Melodies from My Father's House: Hasidic Wisdom for the Heart and Soul. *I was there. The joy he spoke of and exhibited so compelled me that I asked Rabbi Elkins if I could interview him further. After our attempts to arrange a face-to-face meeting failed, we resorted to e-mail. So what follows is a brief experiment that allowed us to use the blessing of technology to chat about the wisdom of the ages.*

When I think of Hasidic Judaism the images that come to mind are men with earlocks and modestly dressed women in Brooklyn or characters in the wonderful novels by Chaim Potok. Can you give our readers some sense about the Hasidic tradition today?

After a few generations the Hasidic movement in some parts began to calcify. "There is nothing so conservative as an old pioneer." After fighting rigidity and extremism, many of them turned to their own brands of extremism and rigidity, and over-ritualized their innovations.

Why are you, a Princeton-based rabbi, drawn to Hasidic Wisdom?

As Martin Buber, I look to the early masters and teachers of Hasidism for their great insights, their fresh approaches, their deep understanding of pristine Judaism, their spirit of constant renewal, joy, spirituality, community, and love of humanity and of Judaism and the Jewish people, the world-wide Jewish "family."

What does an Eighteenth Century Eastern European religious tradition have to teach modern-day pilgrims, especially about the practice of prayer?

There is too much to summarize in a short paragraph. But if I were forced to say it in one sentence, it is the joy, spontaneity, authenticity of prayer that they infuse in all their worship.

When you spoke about your book, *Melodies from My Father's House,* you spoke of the place of joy in the spiritual life. Tell me more.

Even today, among extremist Hasidic groups, you often see them dancing and singing. Look at pictures of Hasidim in their black garb and curly hair locks--they are always smiling, singing, dancing, in praise of God, in accepting their lot, in seeing through phoniness, in getting to the joyous root of life in its essence.

Today people in increasing numbers seem interested in spirituality, especially when spirituality is defined as a private practice or belief one chooses from a smorgasbord of spiritual options in order to find personal happiness. What does Hasidic wisdom have to say to those seeking personal fulfillment?

Hasidism is based on traditional Judaism, and is rooted in a community and a tradition. People who "flirt" and "jump" from place

to place, and are overly eclectic might find that it's like trying five different kinds of liquor in one sitting. Instead of being uplifted, they might vomit. (Sorry for the crude analogy, but I think its graphicness is meaningful.)

Please share a special story of discovery from your time spent selecting and translating Hasidic Wisdom sayings that will give our readers a glimpse into the vibrancy of the Hasidic community.

I love the story of the rabbi who sent his disciple to learn from a fellow rabbi. When asked what he should learn, what parts of Torah, the teacher answered: "I am sending you to learn from him--not words of Torah, but how he ties his shoelaces!" It's the details, the small daily things which we learn from our role models, not necessarily book knowledge which we can glean for our own lives.

Finally, how has your familiarity with these wisdom sayings, and Hasidism nourished your life?

Like all good stories and aphorisms, the teachings of Hasidism keep returning to me like a "melody from my father's house," which swims in my head and which brightens each day, points me in clear directions, and adds more love, joy, commitment, and value to every minute of every day. □

Tom Dunham

Whoever does not see God in every place
Does not see God in any place

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk

✡ ✡ ✡ ✡

Just as we accept
That our neighbor's face does not
resemble ours,
So must we accept
That our neighbor's views do not
resemble ours.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotz

✡ ✡ ✡ ✡

That a person does not arrive at
a new insight everyday,
Is a sign that he also acquired
nothing old of others' insights.

Rabbi Aharon of Karlin

Sayings from Melodies From My Father's House: Hasidic Wisdom for the Heart and Soul. *Edited by Simcha Raz, selected by Dov Peretz Elkins. Copyright © Dov PeretzElkins, 1996. Reprinted by permission of Growth Associates Publishers, 212 Stuart Road East, Princeton, NJ 08540-1946.*

If one believes in the loving-kindness
of the Creator
There are no questions.
And if one does not believe--
There are no answers.

Rabbi Yaakov of Radzimin

✡ ✡ ✡ ✡

Every person should have
two pockets.
In one should be
a piece of paper
on which is written:
"I am but dust and ashes."
In the other:
"For my sake was the
world created."

Rabbi Simcha Bunam of Pshis'cha

Looking for God

MARDI McCABE

Poet and artist William Blake wrote: "God Appears and God is Light." This writer looks for God's bright appearance in each day. She, like Blake, seeks images and words to express the infinite and explains: "When I write of God I wish to express the infinitely personal and intimate nature of that which we name 'God,' and so I need to use personal pronouns. I have chosen to use the masculine form only because that form is most familiar and least awkward to Western readers. But try to mentally retain an image of God which can only be true if it includes both masculine and feminine aspects."

I grew up with ministers and missionaries who tended to divide the whole world into those acceptable to God and those unacceptable. I wasn't comfortable with that view of life and also found myself too often coming up on the wrong side of the equation. They wanted to save me from things I didn't particularly want to be saved from--like my musical tastes, my clothes choices, and my book preferences.

I thought perhaps psychiatrists and psychologists could better perceive the diversity of life, but I soon discovered they divided the world too. They used different words but they still saw the world composed of those who are acceptable and those who need to be saved.

I decided I much preferred the perspectives of the artists. Many writers, artists, and poets, don't divide the world at all. They take it

Mardi McCabe works as a professional artist in South Carolina. She writes: "Two trajectories, art and the spiritual, have become the focus of my passion and my energy."

whole and with ingenious slight-of-pen transform it into something of beauty and meaning. They see God in the face of a dissolute reprobate and show us eternity in a lost soul. But later, when I again turned to the writers and artists, I found many no longer saw God anywhere. They see only the face of hopeless humanity adrift in a dark eternity. God was no longer found in some deep and mysterious way in our own souls. Only the hard realities of ourselves resided there.

I seek the ones who see God everywhere and in everything. They look at the world honestly and clearly but they see with the eyes of the heart. They embrace all in a wonder of love and delight because they see God in every moment and particle. I do not wish to be shown the world as it is. I can see enough of that just by getting up in the morning. I want to see God within the world as it is.

Yet it seems only Mother Teresa of Calcutta is capable of cultivating that perspective. I am not a saint, or a nun, or an advanced soul. I don't meditate or see auras. I've had no spiritual experiences, and I'm not aware of any psychic vibrations or other subtle sensations that others sense. I've never seen an angel or heard the voice of God.

> I imagine God as a bright blue light permeating every molecule in the universe, flowing through, around, and within everything that is, connecting all things in a wonderful unity of Being.

So what can I do? The only thing I have is my imagination. I got it from reading a lot of stories all my life, and imagining myself in stories. Everybody has an imagination. I was told the imagination is sort of frivolous. It doesn't pay the rent or advance your career to sit and stare at the sunset and wonder about where God is and what He's doing right now and if He minds if we call Him "She." We don't have time to imagine. We've got to work and meet obligations and responsibilities. Our lives are taken up with getting places on time and getting things done on time and living up to expectations--ours and everyone else's.

We tend to divide the world, too, into competent and incompetent,

the fast-movers and the slow-movers, the quick-minded and the simple-minded. We spend our lives trying to come up on the "right" side of all the divisions we've set up.

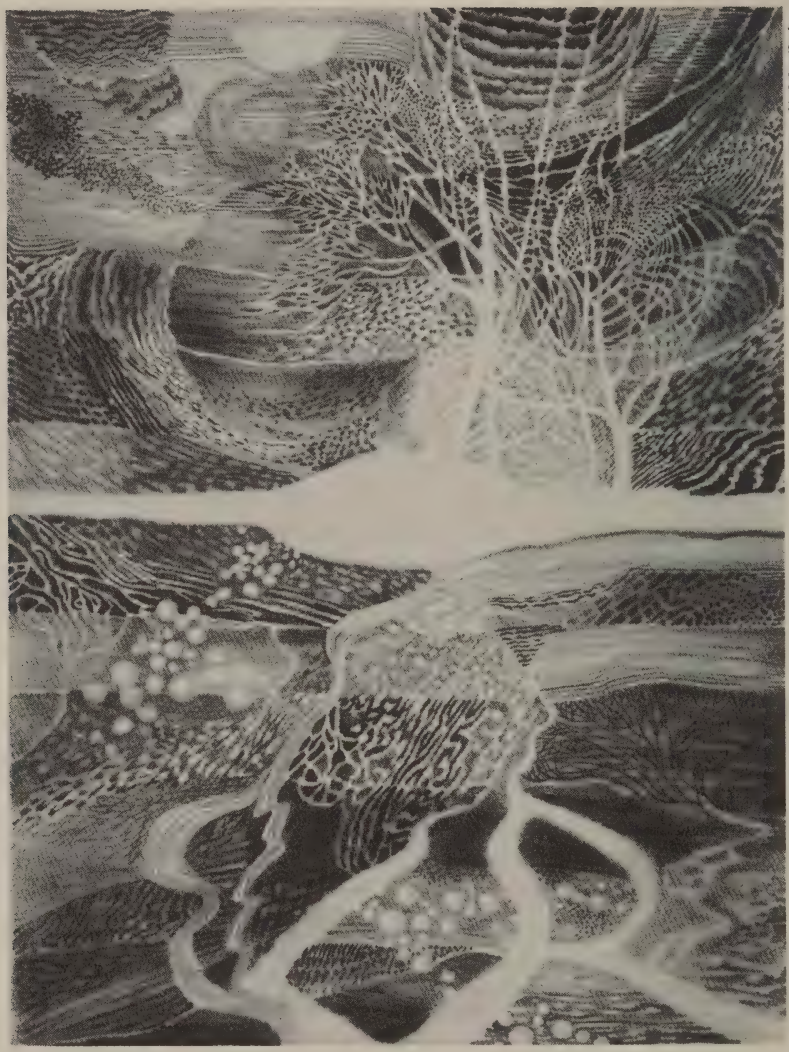
But when I imagine what it must mean that God is everywhere and in everything, I can't imagine life being divided. If God is everywhere then there is nowhere that God is not. I must be thinking of something other than God. I must be imagining something else if I imagine somewhere or something or someone that does not contain God. If God is everywhere, then I should be able to find God anywhere. So I think of the most impossible place I can imagine for God to be and try to imagine Him present there.

I imagine God as a bright blue light permeating every molecule in the universe, flowing through, around, and within every thing that is, connecting all things in a wonderful unity of Being. The light runs through the molecules of air, every grain of earth, every living form, every light wave and every force of the universe. Yet God must also be beyond all that we know and can understand. All that exists is within Him and He is within all that exists. He is in the grass and the trees, in the sunlight and shadows, in every particle of gas or stone. Everything that is, is alive with the presence of God. I imagine God, Infinite Consciousness, Infinite Bliss, Infinite Beauty, permeating every neutron of the universe. And yet this whole material existence is only the temporary, passing expression of the shadow of the Reality which is God. If the shadow is so exquisitely beautiful what must be the beauty of His reality?

I don't have the time or the patience to sit and think of God while watching the sunrise. I have as many obligations and expectations snapping at my heels as anyone. But I've found the day is full of unused moments scattered unnoticed among the activities. And everything can be a point of departure for imagining God. When I'm taking a shower, or brushing my teeth, or preparing dinner, or driving to work, I can imagine God in that moment. I can wonder how and why and when and where God expresses Himself in each of these moments. I can imagine Him accompanying me, participating in life with me, and I wonder how He feels about all this. When I'm waiting in a line I can imagine the

wonderful mystery of how God is equally part of everyone there, filling their lives, and no one notices. He is the air that we breathe, the earth on which we walk, the beauty of the sun, the chill of the rain, the wonder of love. God is in joy and sorrow, in he and she, in high and low, in plenty and poverty. God is in all things. There is nowhere He is not. To spend our moments imagining that truth changes how we see everything.

I cannot see God everywhere and in everything. But I would rather spend my life imagining how that could be than in trying to get on the "right" side of every division we make between one another. □



Mardi McCabe

"light at the center spreading"

A PRAYER FOR WORLD RELIGIONS

O God, who created all peoples in Your image,
We thank You for the wonderful diversity of race, cultures,
And the great religions of the world.
Each, at its best, contains some of the one Light that comes from You.
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of understanding and
fellowship. Show us Your presence in those who differ most from us,
So we may grow in knowledge of Your love for all Your children.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Anita Wheatcroft

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following
your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does
in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from
that desire.
And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the
right road though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem
to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton

Anita Wheatcroft is a regular contributor to Fellowship in Prayer *and to a number of religious magazines.*

Beyond Loneliness

NAN C. MERRILL

While struggling with the loss of a long marriage this writer found that her anguished cries were met with Divine Presence and "winged" assurance.

A divorce is a kind of death, a great loss more often than not. After twenty-some years of what I continue to view as a good marriage, which brought forth five beautiful new lives, separation was a wrenching experience. Besides the loss of a loved one, close friends--surprised, embarrassed and angry over their own loss of a couple-oriented friendship and possibly forced to take a new look at their own marriages--suddenly were no longer friends. And being a presence for five grieving teenagers was close to overwhelming. Valiantly, I coped; the super-mom archetype took over. Still, I always felt exhausted, used up, spent. And my own grief...?

Quite unconsciously and by sheer necessity, for a year and a half, I spent almost every moment that I wasn't engaged with the children or work in my bedroom just being with my grief. I relived what had been, and I let go of future dreams; I wept over the pain that this inflicted on the children and the larger family; I admitted the part my own fears and inability to communicate my feelings had played in the breakdown of the marriage; I cried out my guilt and prayed for forgiveness. And I wondered how I would respond--or just get by--on holidays.

The first Thanksgiving after the separation I knew would be difficult. I would be alone. Since the children were worried about me, I put on a brave front and announced I had made plans for myself. Having said that, I felt inspired to express how I was feeling by doing something positive.

Nan C. Merrill, author of Psalms of the Beloved, *ministers through Friends of Silence in Vermont.*

I decided that while others were celebrating their gratitude with feast, I would be in solidarity with those who hungered around the world: I would fast, and any pain that might come would be offered up for people who haven't enough to eat.

Late in the afternoon, when I was feeling the pangs of hunger and loneliness, I decided to drive around and say hello to winter approaching. I wandered onto roads that I had never traveled before, perhaps symbolically seeking a new path for my life. Just as I had thoughts of turning toward home, I came upon a meadow, a pond and at least one hundred and fifty Canadian geese grazing over the area. I stopped to watch, spellbound with wonder. After what must have been twenty minutes or so, I noticed one lone goose take off and fly out of sight. I felt a kinship with that goose, sensing my own oneness on this family feast day. Yet I did not feel sad.

I was aware of gratitude for the interdependence of all life. I recognized that we are never truly alone.

I had all but forgotten the lone goose, when it reappeared and joined the others. As I continued to observe it I noted that it made a motion with its head. To my amazement, all the other geese immediately began to line up in various groupings, like soldiers in a military parade. I held my breath in anticipation as they remained motionless. Then, as the lead goose gave another nod of the head, the groups took off in precise formations. They flew away, then returned for one final circling of the pond and were gone. As feelings of wonder welled up, I was aware of gratitude for the interdependence of all life. I recognized that we are never truly alone.

During these difficult months, it seemed as if the Universe was conspiring every now and then to awaken me to inner peace and joy. Once, on a gray January evening, I was home alone feeling bereft and lonely. Sitting on the couch barely aware of the snowstorm raging at the

window, I wept into the Silence. After what must have been a long time, anger welled up and I rather arrogantly cried out, "You promised You would not give us more than we can bear! This is my limit, so please do something!"

Suddenly, I heard a soft rustling at the window and turned to look. There on the outside sill sat a most beautiful white dove. Even though I thought this couldn't be, there she was, there for me. We contemplated one another for several minutes. I closed my eyes in a prayer of gratitude for the peace and love which now enveloped me. When I opened my eyes, though the visitation had ended, the dove's imprint continued to live in my heart. And sometimes, even now, as I sit in the Silence, I smile in wonder at the infinite variety of ways in which Divine Presence knocks at the door of our souls, to love and comfort us, and to surprise us with new life!

Another day over a year after the separation, when I was in the throes of despair, for the second time in my life I cried out, "You promised we would not be given more than we can bear! This is my bottom line!"

Within minutes I was suffused by what I can only call Love. As I basked in this loving embrace, I felt humbled and cleansed. And then, as if to emphasize that a new dawn was breaking through, a cardinal lit on a bough of the pine tree by the window singing what sounded to me like, "pret-ty...pret-ty...pret-ty." And I, who had so long felt rejected, lonely and unlovely, could now smile and offer a prayer of gratitude.

When years later a second great loss confronted me, I was prepared to process it consciously. The pain was no less; in fact, it seemed even greater. I realized now that each major loss we face is likely to trigger all the unresolved, ungrieved moments of our lives. The inner city church in Detroit, where I had come to live and work was unexpectedly and rather harshly closed. Suddenly bridges to my future were burned.

Once again, I was thrust into the role of helping others--this time aiding a community in dealing with anger, disbelief, and grief. Yet, I had learned how crucial it was not to neglect my own need to grieve. Late at night alone in my room, I allowed my tears to flow; at the same time, I anticipated the blessings that I had learned to expect when I am open to receive them. And, of course, they came...blessings too numerous to enumerate!

The grieving process again took well over a year. And just as with the loss of a loved one, the sadness wells up from time to time. Yet, the imprint of that life, those people, will ever be marked upon the heart.

Good grief involves tears...tears that help us let go of any need for power and control. They help us to abandon ourselves to the healing process, learn true humility, which puts us in touch with our inner being and with the One who comforts, guides, and loves us into new life. Grief may involve a myriad of painful emotions such as anger, resentment, fear, worry, guilt, sadness, and loneliness, but it leads to a recognition of blessing, grace, and gratitude, to a sense of the interdependence and interrelatedness of all things, and to the inner peace that comes from trusting that the Universe lovingly cares for us. Good grief leads one from mourning and weeping into renewed life and, yes, even a quiet joy. □

Darlene Prestbo

Becoming Who We Are

ROSE MARY DOUGHERTY

Can our hearts' desires be trusted? This spiritual guide encourages listening to our innermost parts as a way to "hear God's prayer within us."

Several months ago I had what I have come to call "my recurring dream." I've had the same dream periodically over the past ten years. In the dream I am young and I am going to several personal wisdom figures, asking them if they think I should enter religious life (which I did some thirty years ago). In retrospect, the dream has always seemed the herald of some change in my life, some invitation to be issued, a decision to be made. The "entering religious life" always has to do with my going for God very intentionally.

The dream several months ago was a little different. I was still wondering if I should enter religious life. I was approaching the same people for answers, but as I came to each of them, I knew it wasn't right to ask them. Then I saw a little boy, three or four years old, with large brown eyes. I asked him my question, "Do you think I should enter religious life?" He looked at me with piercing, puzzled eyes. Finally he said, "Do you wanna?"

I awoke from the dream smiling and at peace. It was all so simple. For years in my dream (and probably more often in real life than I care to admit) I had wanted someone else to tell me what to do, to give their answers to my questions. This little child was the only one who had asked in this dream, "Do you wanna?" In asking this, he had called me back to myself, had invited me to listen to my heart.

Rose Mary Dougherty is Director of Spiritual Guidance at Shalem Institute. *Reprinted by permission from* Shalem News, *the newsletter of Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, 5430 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814.*

For some of us, listening to our hearts, to our "wanna's," can seem like a selfish thing. It implies ignoring the needs around us and just doing what we want. I have come to believe, however, that listening to our "wanna's" brings us to the core of our being, where we are most authentically ourselves. In that place, we can hear God's prayer within us. We can sort through all the needs and expectations around us and choose, among all the things we might do, what fits with who we are in God.

Some of us have been taught to make our life decisions by answering the question, "What would Jesus do if Jesus were here?" Jesus would do what Jesus would do. We must do what we must do. Jesus demonstrated this truth: When the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to ask him a favor, he asked: "What do you want?" When Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me," Jesus didn't presume to know what he wanted. Instead, he asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" When a few disciples began to follow him, he looked them squarely in the eye and questioned: "What do you want?" When he was with them, he invited his followers to listen to their hearts. When he was about to leave them, he promised them the Spirit of Truth who would "guide them to all truth." The same Spirit of truth and authenticity that animated Jesus animates us. We need only listen.

This listening is not easy. It requires a trust that there is within our hearts an inner wisdom that we only need to seek. The point of being in the company of a guru, a wisdom figure, or even a spiritual director is not to be given that person's truth but rather to be led inside to our own.

The danger of reading the lives of the saints or being excessively inspired by holy people is that we can tend to mistake their path for ours. We may try to emulate them without reference to our own inner calling. We may take on spiritual practices that have no bearing on our life in God. In effect, we may relinquish authenticity, our true greatness in God, for the sake of a false self, an image we have created of whom we should become. Perhaps that is something of what Thomas Merton meant when he said: "Many would-be saints never become saints for the same reason that many poets never become great poets. They are too busy trying to write the poetry of other poets."

If Thomas Merton is right, and I think he is, what is it that would-be

saints can learn from other saints? What can we learn from gurus and wisdom figures? Perhaps what we can learn is that they are single-minded. They have discovered and lived the truth of the gospel imperative, "Those who will save their lives will lose them, but those who lose their lives will find them." They have been willing to relinquish everything, all images of themselves and expectation of others, even all dreams of ever becoming great, for the sake of finding themselves in God. They are great simply because they are ever becoming themselves.

Yet the greatness of the saints lies not in their doing; the greatness lies in their response to LOVE which ever beckons them and empowers them to love. In the end, their greatness lies in their willingness to relinquish all for the sake of LOVE, to be united with LOVE. In this oneness they come to an all pervasive love--for themselves, for the world, for all creation.

Perhaps the invitation of the saints to us is the invitation to LOVE. The "how-to's" of our response must be ours, however. There are generic means available to us--tried and true practices that others have found valuable--but we must test these for ourselves. Nobody else can respond to the uniqueness of our invitation.

The "wanna's" of our lives have much to tell us. They give us glimpses into who we are and what is really important to us. When we can listen deeply enough to these, beneath the enticements to success, or fame, or greatness, we will hear the voice of LOVE, Inner Wisdom, questioning us: "What do you want, what do you really want?" As we live our response to this question, we are empowered to become who we really are. □

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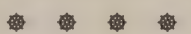
The sail of the ship of man's being is belief.
When there is a sail, the wind can carry him
To place after place of power and wonder.
No sail, all words are wind.

Andrew Harvey from Light Upon Light: Inspirations from Rumi, *North Atlantic Books.*

A certain kind of simplicity, the kind characteristic of a Gospel parable, a Sufi poem, a Zen story, a Dickinson verse, or a scene from Beckett, accompanies the descent of spiritual attention to the lower, earthier regions of the soul. As that attention lowers, it casts a glow on everything mundane, making sacred and secular not opposites, but inseparable companion qualities in a world not torn into spirit and matter, mind and body, or even soul and spirit.

Thomas Moore from "The Soul's Religion," *Parabola, Summer 1996.*



"The most important thing you can do is what you're doing when you're doing it. When you're out there, basketball should be the most important thing. When you play, *play*. When you study, *study*. Then it's not hard to separate the two. Somebody asked Fred Astaire when he was practicing, 'Why do you work so hard?' He said, 'To make things easy.'

"This is a tough school," Carril says. "Kids ask me how they can compete with the quality of student here. I tell them: Don't. You compete with yourself. It's what you do versus what you could do that counts. Life or basketball, it's all the same."

Princeton basketball Coach Pete Carril

Bede Griffiths at Apple Farm: A Personal Memory

HELEN LUKE

Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) monk, priest, abbot, and author of ten books, concerned himself with unity. He lived the question, how can the personalism of Christianity and the nondualism of Hinduism be reconciled? From 1955 onward, Bede Griffiths resided in India, mostly at Shantivanam--"Forest of Peace"--monastery where the faith expressed was Christian, the lifestyle thoroughly Indian. During his last visit to the United States Bede briefly recounted his journey:

> *Perhaps I should begin where I started. I've been a Benedictine Monk for almost sixty years. I became a monk when I was a young man in England because I was disillusioned with the world around me. After the 1914 war there was a great feeling of disenchantment and disillusionment everywhere, especially at Oxford where I was studying. When I left Oxford, I had no understanding of any meaning or purpose in life, and I went to live with two friends in the country to try to discover some meaning in life--to get back to roots. We had a little cottage, and a garden and a cow, and we tried to live a very simple life. We began to read the Bible, and for the first time, the Bible meant something to me. I think I read it three times and it changed our lives--all three of us.*
>
> *When I came out of that, I had to find somewhere to live this experience that had come, and by the grace of God I found the Catholic Church--through Newman largely--and then I found a monastery in South*

Excerpts from The Other Half of My Soul: Bede Griffiths and the Hindu-Christian Dialogue. *Compiled by Beatrice Bruteau.* *Copyright (c) Beatrice Bruteau 1996. Reprinted by permission of Quest Books, P.O. Box 270, Wheaton, IL 60189-0270.*

England. And it was a wonderful experience. I'll never forget it and never cease to be thankful for it. It gave me everything I wanted at the time, and the first thing was what Father Matthew [Fox] has been talking about: the mystical dimension of religion and in life. I had no idea of it. My friends and I were lovers of poetry and lovers of nature, but beyond that we had nothing. And now this experience suddenly showed me there is something beyond nature and poetry. I've never questioned it. It was the community --it was really a community of love. I've never felt so much love as I met in that community.

And so we had a very balanced life. We had prayer seven times a day; we chanted the Gregorian chants and it was wonderful music--it went into your heart and into your mind--it was beautiful. We also had a wonderful library; we could study anything we liked. And we did manual work every day for two or three hours. There was almost nothing I didn't do: making stone, mixing concrete, helping in the building, and working in the fields and in the garden. That was wonderful too, because it wasn't only the mind, it was also the body and the earth, and that experience was in me from that time onward. So, I'm very thankful for that monastery, and I was there for twenty years.

In the course of that time I began to get interested in Eastern thought, and I met a very wonderful woman called Toni Sussman. She was a German and one of Jung's first disciples, so she knew Jungian psychology, and she also had all the books on Eastern mysticism and Eastern religion. That was in 1940, and it opened a new world for me. From then on I began to look towards India as the land of promise, and by the grace of God again, I met an Indian Benedictine monk from Canada who came to our monastery and asked me if I

would come and start a foundation with him in India. So in 1955 I realized my dream and I said to a friend, "I'm trying to find the other half of my soul." Because, you know, our Christian tradition develops your spiritual mind and the upper faculties wonderfully, but it neglects the lower faculties--the earthly faculties--and it neglects the feminine. It masters the masculine and neglects the feminine. And I was searching for this other side of my being, and that's what I found in India.

During this same visit Bede Griffiths also spoke at Apple Farm Community, near Three Rivers, Michigan. Community founder and Jungian therapist Helen Luke, author of Dark Wood to White Rose, *offers her own "memories, dreams, and reflections" of this man whose life affirmed the "kinship of all."*

Father Bede gave a talk in our small meeting house, to which about fifty of our friends came, and his particular message shines in our memory, while the impact of having been in his presence touches the eternal spark in each of us. Others have spoken of his prophetic words about religious groups among lay people as being essential guardians of the Spirit in our time, and of their work of restoring the sense of the sacred on every level of our daily lives--a sense that has been almost completely lost here in the West. In the dark ages that followed the complete breakdown of the law and order established by the Roman Empire, he said, the great monasteries were the keepers of the flame through the centuries. But Father Bede laid great stress in his talk with us on an essential aspect of such groups in this our time of a new and terrible dark age of violence and loss of meaning: these groups must remain *small*. This had a particularly deep meaning for us here at Apple Farm, and we felt a profound gratitude that somehow we had intended from our beginning in 1963 that we not do what many of the small groups

and communes starting at that time did, which was to set out with as much publicity as possible and appeals for money from foundations, etc., with the obvious hope of support from collective institutions and the attraction of new members. Most of these groups that we knew of came to an end and faded away after a very few years. Many of our respected advisers had put pressure on us to do something of this kind, but we insisted that we were simply a group of friends, whose particular experience of life, and of what C. G. Jung has called the way of individuation, could perhaps be shared with other individuals who either could not afford or were not in need of clinical analysis, but yearned for meaning in their inner lives through listening to the voice of their dreams. Our way is indeed based on the same attitude as that which Father Bede called "the sense of the sacred" in all the smallest happenings of daily life--in its often seemingly meaningless conflicts and hurt feelings, its experiences of darkness and of light, of happiness and pain. We have remained small, simply a focal point, a meeting place, for mutual support and discussion. We have never sought to have more than four guests at a time, but through the years people sharing our basic attitude have come to settle nearby, living their own lives and joining in meetings at the Farm, seeking the sacred in their chosen way. We have, of course, a non-profit charter.

The hunger for a renewed sense of meaning in life, for the restoration of that which transcends space and time and the small ego in each of us, is now "erupting," one could say, everywhere. That which is sought is called by many names, though ultimately unnameable by the consciously rational mind. In our tradition it is God, or more deeply, the "I am." The hunger is real and often desperate, but the state of consciousness that has taken over since the enormous increase in rational, extraverted knowledge in the West has brought with it a terrible loss of feeling values, and the result is the worship of quantity at the expense of quality on every level of being. All success, so-called, is identified with large numbers: larger businesses, larger congregations in churches, larger groups, larger bank accounts. The more has become the better, even in the evaluation of good works. And this is most dangerous of all in the hunger for "spiritual experience"--that lonely thing, destroyed by any sort of mass thinking. When a man or woman *identifies* with a strongly numinous experience,

followers may be sought and often come in larger numbers, and a cult begins. The extreme horror of this may result in a Jonestown disaster or something similar.

I think it is important to be careful of the word "religious," especially as applied to communities. The "religious life" has meant for so long the life lived by a community, usually large, within the structure of a particular church, and therefore to apply it to such groups as ours would give a wrong impression. It is true, of course, that such small focal points, if real, are religious in the true and basic meaning of the word. The word *religious*, in Father Bede's teaching, refers to that deepest essence that is finally the unity beyond all the many approaches to religion inside and outside the churches of the world. C. G. Jung, as is well known, said that no psychological neurosis was ever truly healed (made whole) in a person unless he or she found a religious meaning in life--in Father Bede's words "the sense of the sacred." One passage I greatly love is in T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" in his *Four Quartets*: "All shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well by the purification of the motive in the ground of our beseeching." That is the life-long inner work in every human being. It is very hard indeed to discover and purge the ego-centered motive at the root of all the superficial choices that proliferate within us, until we may come, at least in glimpses, to that "condition of complete simplicity costing no less than everything" (Little Gidding") which shines out of Father Bede's sacred humanity.

I would like now to say a little of the two hours or so of private conversation that I had with Father Bede during his visit to Apple Farm, which left me with such a sense of joy and unity, and of the true marriage of East and West incarnate in him. I knew already from having met him some years earlier, when he came to speak at St Gregory's Abbey (Anglican Benedictine, only a mile or so distant from Apple Farm), of his introduction to yoga and the East by Toni Sussman in London, of which he often spoke. She and her husband were Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany. While in Berlin she had had much experience in Hindu thought and practice, and had become a Roman Catholic. She also was one of C. G. Jung's early pupils and was a Jungian analyst. I, too, had met her in those years of the Second World War, and to me, too, she opened the

door to the depths of Eastern religion, as well as taking me on as a student of Jung's way. An enormous enrichment came to me at that time through reading the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, The Tao Te Ching, and the I Ching, and this has increased and deepened through all the fifty years since and in all my work in Jung's psychology, which turned out to be my vocation. Father Bede told me that at that time, when traveling, he often carried Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* in his luggage. Then, last year during our conversation we again remembered Toni, and he said that she had tried at one point to steer him into Jungian work! But his vocation, of course, was abundantly clear. We also had quite a number of English things in common from our youth. Our years at Oxford, for instance, overlapped in the twenties, and although I never met C. S. Lewis, he was a very prominent and influential person in the University during those years. So I could share memories and laughter and that strangely deep meeting that comes through roots in the soil of the country of birth, as well as feeling the radiance of his spirit beyond words.

The affirmation of the kinship of all life beyond duality will grow in those individuals all over the world who, without evasion, consent to suffer the darkness of the extreme tension between opposites, supported by the spirit and the all-embracing love of such great ones as Father Bede. So the light shines still in the darkest palces, each of us carring our tiny unique candle, and thus there may come to our world by grace the global healing of earth and spirit, of the dark and the light, in the oneness beyond and including all opposites.

I end with a vivid dream that came to me on the night after I heard of Father Bede's death. In this dream I saw him lying on his bed and surrounded by a growing number of young people and children. Each one of them was holding out a hand to him in grief and sadness at his going. And then I heard his voice, low but very clear, saying to them, "You have, I know, each one of you, come here in Love; and please remember that in Love there is always joy." □

Praying the Ordinary

RICHARD J. FOSTER

This writer declares, "The work of our hands and of our minds is acted out prayer, a love offering to the living God."

> *Do not forget that the value and interest of life is not so much to do conspicuous things... as to do ordinary things with perception of their enormous value. --Teilhard de Chardin*

Many of us today live in a kind of inner apartheid. We segregate out a small corner of pious activities and then can make no spiritual sense out of the rest of our lives. We have become so accustomed to this way of living that we fail to see the contradiction in it. The scandal of Christianity in our day is the heresy of a 5 percent spirituality.

We overcome this modern heresy by Praying the Ordinary. We pray the ordinary in three ways: first, by turning ordinary experiences of life into prayer; second, by seeing God in the ordinary experiences of life; and third, by praying throughout the ordinary experiences of life.

THE SANCTITY OF THE ORDINARY

I would like to tell you of the death of my mother, Marie Temperance Foster. I was a teenager and she at midlife, or so we thought. Her death, however, was far from sudden or dramatic. At first no one knew what was

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Pages 169-175 from Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, *by Richard J. Foster. Copyright © 1992 by Richard J. Foster. Reprinted by permission of Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.*

wrong--Mom just had difficulty walking. In time her condition was diagnosed as multiple sclerosis, though no one seemed really certain. She grew slowly worse. I sometimes discovered her up at 5:00 A.M., trying to vacuum the floor. She would struggle to clean a small patch of carpet and then slump onto the sofa, exhausted. After a brief rest she was up and working on another patch.

As her condition worsened, we three brothers took over the duties of daily life. Actually, it wasn't so bad, because Mom always cheered us on, and complaint did not seem to be in her vocabulary. When she became bedfast, we set up a hospital bed in the living room. I had become a Christian by this time, and one of my earliest prayers was for her healing. It was not to be.

Soon I was off to college a thousand miles away. Mom was now in the hospital. Three times in that first year I rushed home because the medical staff called, saying the end was near. But each time she would rally a bit, and the dark tragedy of death would be replaced by the untheatrical regularity of the uneventful. Finally my older brother and I made the hard, practical decision that I was not to be notified until Mom had died.

As it turned out, I was home on summer break. Did she know somehow? I was the last one to visit her. For months we were not sure she recognized any of us when we visited, since all speech and physical response was mute. But on that last visit she squeezed my hand. I'm glad for that.

But I was not there when she slipped into eternity. She had been so close for so long that the idea of a vigil was simply not reasonable. It was 2:00 A.M., and she was completely alone...except possibly for the angels of God. She simply stopped breathing. That is what the medical staff said. Actually her leaving was so quiet, so uneventful, that they did not discover it until later.

Perhaps that is as it should be. So much about my mother was uneventful and ordinary. There was no spectacular drama, no newspaper headline, no high adventure. She lived an ordinary life and died an ordinary death.

But she did both well. She loved my father well, and she loved us

kids well. She lived through the drab terrain of the ordinary with grace and gentleness. She accepted her slowly deteriorating condition with a noble faith. She received death as she had life and disability: with patience and courage. My mother understood the sanctity of the ordinary.

THE HOLINESS OF CREATED THINGS

The Bible is almost casual in its assertion that "God created the heavens and the earth...and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:1-31). Then, in the fullness of time, God reinforced and intensified this reality by choosing birth in a stable as his ultimate revelation. How the shepherds must have wondered at the twofold sign by which they were to identify the Messiah--swaddling clothes and a manger. How unimpressive! How commonplace!

But think of this: in the creation and the incarnation the great God of the universe intertwined the spiritual and the material, wedded the sacred and the secular, sanctified the common and the ordinary. How astonishing! How wonderful!

The discovery of God lies in the daily and the ordinary, not in the spectacular and the heroic. If we cannot find God in the routines of home and shop, then we will not find him at all. Ours is to be a symphonic piety in which all the activities of work and play and family and worship and sex and sleep are the holy habitats of the eternal. Thomas Merton urges us to have an "unspeakable reverence for the holiness of created things."

PRAYER IN ACTION

Jesus, we must remember, spent most of his earthly life in what we today would call a blue-collar job. He did not wait until his baptism in the Jordan to discover God. Far from it! Jesus validated the reality of God in the carpentry shop over and over before speaking of the reality of God in his ministry as a rabbi.

Many today see their vocation as a hindrance to prayer. "If only I had some time free from the distractions of work, then I could pray" is a common sentiment. But prayer is not another duty to add onto an already overcommitted schedule. In Praying the Ordinary, our vocation, far from being a hindrance, is an asset.

How is this so? Is it that we learn the secret of praying as we work? Certainly this is important, but it is not why our work is such an asset to prayer. Our vocation is an asset to prayer because our work *becomes* prayer. It is prayer in action. The artist, the novelist, the surgeon, the plumber, the secretary, the lawyer, the homemaker, the farmer, the teacher--all are praying by offering their work up to God.

"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" is Saint Paul's counsel (1Cor. 10:31). I came into a fuller understanding of this counsel when, as a teenager, I was privileged to spend one summer among the Eskimo people of Kotzebue, Alaska. The Eskimo Christians I met there had a deep sense of the wholeness of life, with no break between their prayer and their work.

It is not hard to see how a Michelangelo or a T. S. Eliot is giving glory to God--theirs are creative vocations. But what about the boring jobs, the unimportant jobs, the mundane jobs. How are those prayers?

I had come to Kotzebue on the adventure of helping to "build the first high school above the Arctic Circle," but the work itself was far from an adventure. It was hard, backbreaking labor. One day I was trying to dig a trench for a sewer line--no small task in a world of frozen tundra. An Eskimo man whose face and hands displayed the leathery toughness of many winters came by and watched me for a while. Finally he said simply and profoundly, "You are digging a ditch to the glory of God." He said it to encourage me, I know. And I have never forgotten his words. Beyond my Eskimo friend no human being ever knew or cared whether I dug that ditch well or poorly. In time it was to be covered up and forgotten. But because of my friend's words, I dug with all my might, for every shovelful of dirt was a prayer to God. Even though I did not know it at the time, I was attempting in my small and unsophisticated way to do what the great artisans in the Middle Ages did when they carved the backside of a piece of art, knowing that God alone would see it.

Anthony Bloom writes, "A prayer makes sense only if it is lived. Unless they are 'lived,' unless life and prayer become completely interwoven, prayers become a sort of polite madrigal which you offer to God at moments when you are giving time to Him." The work of our hands and of our minds is acted out prayer, a love offering to the living God. In what is perhaps the finest line in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, Olympic runner Eric Liddell tells his sister, "Jenny, when I run, I feel his pleasure." This is the reality that is to permeate all vocations, whether we are writing a novel or cleaning a latrine.

It is at the latrine cleaning that many have a problem. It is not hard to see how a Michelangelo or a T. S. Eliot is giving glory to God--theirs are creative vocations. But what about the boring jobs, the unimportant jobs, the mundane jobs. How are those prayers?

Here we must understand the order in the kingdom of God. It is precisely in the "slop-bucket job"--the work that we abhor--where we will find God the most. We do not need to have good feelings or a warm glow in order to do work for the glory of God. All good work is pleasing to the Father. Even the jobs that seem meaningless and mindless to us are highly valued in the order of the kingdom of God. God values the ordinary. If, for the glory of God, you are putting an endless supply of nuts on an endless line of bolts, your work is rising up as a sweet-smelling offering to the throne of God. He is pleased with your labor.

"Aren't you glorifying work a bit to much--you know, Protestant work ethic, and all?" you may be wondering. I think not. Work came before the fall, and the curse of the fall was that work would be "by the sweat of your brow"--that is, the results would not be commensurate with the labor put in. In fact, one of the clearest signs of the grace of God upon us is when the results of our labor are far in excess of the amount of work we do. We glorify God in our labor because we most closely approximate the Creator when we engage in the creative activity of work.

"But what about those who have no jobs, the unemployed and the retired? How do they Pray the Ordinary?" you may ask. We can all work wether we have employable skills or not. Remuneration is not a factor in deciding the value of labor in the kingdom of God. If our abilities or opportunities allow for nothing more than picking up sticks, we are to do

so with all our might to the glory of God and the good of our neighbor.

"Can a person live a full, satisfying life that glorifies God without work?" you may question. I do not know how. Certainly all things are possible with God, but I am sure such a thing would be the exception and

> I am drawn to those who are able to simply meet people where they are, with no need to control or manage or make them do anything.

not the rule. In fact, I value labor as a reflection of the image of God within us so much that my personal conviction is that part of the bliss of heaven will be joyous, creative, productive work.

THE PRAYER OF ACTION

We are also Praying the Ordinary when we engage in what Jean-Nicholas Grou calls "the prayer of action:" "Every action performed in the sight of God because it is the will of God, and in the manner that God wills, is a prayer and indeed a better prayer than could be made in words at such times."

Each activity of daily life in which we stretch ourselves on behalf of others is a prayer of action--the times when we scrimp and save in order to get the children something special; the times when we share our car with others on rainy mornings, leaving early to get them to work on time; the times when we keep up correspondence with friends or answer one last telephone call when we are dead tired at night. These times and many more like them are lived prayer. Ignatius of Loyola notes, "Everything that one turns in the direction of God is prayer."

Waiting is part of ordinary time. We discover God in our waiting: waiting in checkout lines, waiting for the telephone to ring, waiting for graduation, waiting for a promotion, waiting to retire, waiting to die. The waiting itself becomes prayer as we give our waiting to God. In waiting we begin to get in touch with the rhythms of life--stillness and action, listening and decision. They are the rhythms of God. It is in the everyday

and the commonplace that we learn patience, acceptance, and contentment. Saint Benedict's criterion for allowing a visitor to stay at the monastery is that "he is content with the life as he finds it, and does not make excessive demands...but is simply content with what he finds."

I am attracted to this "contentment without excessive demands" because it is the way I would really like to live. In a world in which *Winning Through Intimidation* is the order of the day, I am attracted to people who are free from the tyranny of assertiveness. I am drawn to those who are able to simply meet people where they are, with no need to control or manage or make them do anything. I enjoy being around them because they draw the best out in me without any manipulation whatsoever.

Another way of Praying the Ordinary is by praying throughout the ordinary experiences of life. We pick up a newspaper and are prompted to whisper a prayer of guidance for world leaders facing monumental decisions. We are visiting with friends in a school corridor or a shopping mall, and their words prompt us to lapse into prayer for them, either verbally or silently, as the circumstances dictate. We jog through our neighborhood, blessing the families who live there. We plant our garden, thanking the God of heaven for sun and rain and all good things. This is the stuff of ordinary prayer through ordinary experience. □

The Sistering Life

ROSE TILLEMANS

Words fail to adequately express the ineffable bonds that tie together those who live a common life for the good of all. This writer coins the word "sistering" to describe "one way in which holy energy has kept hearts alive through the centuries."

My commitment to sistering is a lifelong walk with other earthlings as one who tries to be attuned to the sacred and is called to "serve the dear neighbor without distinction." This was the goal defined by our founding sisters.

Sistering is also an embracing of the parts of the scriptures which call me to compassion, non-violence, right relationship, peacemaking, confrontation, and sometimes dissent. Many other people embrace these concepts, and I find close companionship with them as they respond to their callings according to their own particular life styles. In my sistering I have the continued blessing of a supportive circle of sisters, drawn as I am to a community rooted in a long history of commitment to common goals of mercy and justice.

Each of us finds through sistering an attunement with God's energy, so clearly defined for some and perhaps less clearly for others. But there is indeed for me a Holy One who invites me to work for unity and reconciliation in our community, the church, and the world. This One calls me to be caring and a receiver of the caring of others wherever I happen to be.

In the sistering profession I might differ widely from other women in my community in personal theology, images or concepts of God,

Rose Tillemans, a sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, is coordinator of Peace House in Minneapolis, MN.

understanding of what church is, the Eucharist, my ways of praying, and the role of Jesus in my life. But I believe I share a common dedication with many to biblical precepts: Love your neighbor as yourself....be compassionate....do good to those who hate you and persecute you....forgive....feed the hungry.... house the homeless....put down the sword....be faithful....trust....don't go after possessions....live in hope....plant seeds....love creation....share yourself and your goods with gracious generosity.

Often I hear the Holy One say to me: "Be with the poor and listen to their wisdom; be frugal in your spending to form a solidarity with those who are hungry and homeless; speak out when you see the powerful oppressing the little ones." Silence often means consent. Sistering for me is embracing the world's scriptures, prophets, and leaders, especially those who call me to passionate action, deeper prayer, and fuller attunement with the Holy.

Poverty, chastity, and obedience do not express my heart's commitment to the "kingdom." Having worked among the poor for 20 years, I know I could not prudently choose the pain of real poverty and fulfill my mission among those who suffer so severely. But for me, sistering means that I must spend sparingly and live as simply as possible, sometimes frugally, as a matter of justice. What the Gospel and my community call me to is solidarity with the poor, and in my small way I can make the distribution of wealth more fair by my life choices. I know that it is not chastity that draws me to love more deeply, and I believe I actually frown on the word obedience, since group decision-making and power-sharing are more my style. The three official vows have been dressed in many different words, but I cannot cling to poverty, chastity, and obedience, when it seems that the world is calling me far beyond these ancient concepts. I might tell people I am a sister, but I don't say I am in the religious life. Those words seem far too elitist to me as I move among lay people whose lives are very religious.

In sisterhood I am graced with rich opportunities for spiritual, professional, and intellectual growth with support from my community's common storehouse. I find commonality in my community's dedication to mercy and compassion and to prayer as an energy-power beyond all telling. I am blessed with financial security to carry out my dreams and work. I am provided for when I am sick and will be attended to in old age and death. This all comes as a bounty in our common efforts to promise faithfulness to ourselves, God, one another and the world's calls.

Through sistering I am led to walk more gently on Mother Earth, to listen to her heartbeat, to inhale daily the holy breath of all life as I fumble, stumble and walk upright through my days. I an "sacramented" continually by those I touch and those who touch me, also by creation's blessedness.

Where I work at Peace House, a gathering place in inner city Minneapolis for poor, street and economically comfortable people, sistering often means helping to create our own eucharistic celebrations, sharing our stories, songs, prayers, blessing bread and asking the bread to bless us. When we are sick or hurting we might anoint one another with oil--from the co-op, not the cathedral. I experience faithfulness to the church and fulfillment in our street community.

Sistering is one way in which holy energy has kept hearts alive and moving through the centuries. Although few women feel directed to our life as it is today, we accept our evolution as a part of the church's long history. We might appear rather elderly, but we are still alive and moving, perhaps now more than ever. There is a hopefulness I us as we see committed women and men forming new communities, some closely connected to us. The Holy One has not spelled out the future very clearly yet, but we have confidence that there will always be a divine beckoning for earthlings to draw together, to share their gifts and to promise through some form of community work that "renews the face of the earth." □

The Essentials of Zen Practice

MASTER HSU-YUN

THE OBJECTIVE OF ZEN PRACTICE:

The objective of Zen practice is to illuminate the mind by eradicating its impurities and seeing into one's true self-nature. The mind's impurities are wrong thoughts and attachments. Self-nature is the wisdom and virtue of the Tathagata. The wisdom and virtue of Buddhas and sentient beings are not different from one another. To experience this wisdom and virtue, leave behind duality, discrimination, wrong thinking and attachment. This is Buddhahood. If one cannot do this, then one remains an ordinary sentient being.

It is because you and I are defiled that we have been wandering lost and confused through Samsara for limitless eras, and that we cannot immediately cast off wrong thinking and see our original nature. For this reason we must practice Zen.

The prerequisite for Zen practice is to eradicate wrong thinking. Sakyamuni Buddha taught much on this subject. His simplest and most direct teaching is the word "stop" from the expression "stopping is Enlightenment." From the time when Bodhidharma transmitted Zen teachings to today, the winds of Zen have blown far and wide, shaking and illuminating the world. Among the many things that Bodhidharma and the Sixth Patriarch taught to those who came to study with them, none is more valuable than the saying, "Put down all entangling conditions, let not one thought arise."

This expression is truly the prerequisite for the practice of Zen. If you cannot fulfill this requirement, then not only will you fail to attain the ultimate goal of Zen practice, but you will not even be able to enter the door of Zen. How can you talk of practicing Zen if you are entangled by worldly phenomena with thought after thought arising and passing away?

This article is reprinted with permission from the Ch'an Newsletter of the Ch'an Meditation Center in Elmhurst, New York.

PUT DOWN ALL ENTANGLING CONDITIONS:

"Put down all entangling conditions, let not one thought arise" is a prerequisite for the practice of Zen. Now that we know this, how do we accomplish it? The best practitioner, one of superior abilities, can stop all thoughts forever, arrive directly at the condition of non-arising, and instantly experience Enlightenment. Such a person is not entangled by anything.

The next best kind of practitioner uses principle to cut off phenomena and realizes that self-nature is originally pure. Vexation and Enlightenment, Samsara and Nirvana--all are false names which have nothing to do with one's self-nature. All things are dreams and illusions, like bubbles or reflections.

Within self-nature, my body, made up of the four great elements, as well as the mountains, rivers, and great earth itself are like bubbles in the sea, arising and disappearing, yet never obstructing the original surface. Do not be captivated by the arising, abiding, changing and passing away of illusory phenomena, which give rise to pleasure and aversion, grasping and rejecting. Give up your whole body, as if you were dead, and the six sense organs, the six sense objects and the six sense consciousness will naturally disperse. Greed, hatred, ignorance, and love will be destroyed. All the sensations of pain, suffering, and pleasure which attend the body--hunger, cold, satiation, warmth, glory, insult, birth and death, calamity, prosperity, good and bad luck, praise, blame, gain and loss, safety and danger--will no longer be your concern. Only this can be considered true renunciation--when you put everything down forever. This is what is meant by renouncing all phenomena.

When all phenomena are renounced, wrong thoughts disappear, discrimination does not arise, and attachment is left behind. When thoughts no longer arise, the brightness of self-nature manifests itself completely. At this time you will have fulfilled the necessary conditions for Zen practice. Then, further hard work and sincere practice will enable you to illuminate the mind and see into your true nature.

EVERYONE CAN INSTANTLY BECOME A BUDDHA:

Many teaching practitioners ask questions about the Dharma. The

Tom Dunham

Dharma that is spoken is not the true Dharma. As soon as you try to explain things, the true meaning is lost. When you realize that "one mind" is the Buddha, from that point on there is nothing more to do. Everything is already complete. All talk about practice or attainment is demonic deception.

Bodhidharma's "Direct pointing at the mind, seeing into one's nature and attaining Buddhahood" clearly instructs that all sentient beings are Buddhas. Once pure self-nature is recognized, one can harmonize with the environment yet remain undefiled. The mind will remain unified throughout the day, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down. This is to already be a Buddha. At this point there is no need to put forth effort and be diligent. Any action is superfluous. No need to bother with the slightest thought or word. Therefore, to become a Buddha is the easiest, most unobstructed task. Do it by yourself. Do not seek outside yourself for it.

All sentient beings--who eternally sink in the sea of suffering, and who vow to attain Buddhahood and the four virtues of Nirvana (eternity, joy, self, purity)--can immediately attain Buddhahood if they wholly believe in the sincere words of the Buddha and the patriarchs: renounce everything, and think neither of good nor evil. The vow to deliver all sentient beings, made by all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and patriarchs, is not a boast nor is it a baseless, empty vow.

The Dharma is exactly that. It has been elucidated again and again by the Buddha and the patriarchs. They have exhorted us with the truth. They do not deceive us. Unfortunately, sentient beings are confused and for limitless ages have experienced birth and death in the sea of suffering, appearing and disappearing, endlessly taking on new forms of life. Dazed and confused, entangled in the worldly dust of the six senses with their backs to enlightenment, they are like pure gold in a cesspool. Because of the severity of the problem, Buddha compassionately taught 84,000 Dharma doors to accord with the varying karmic roots of sentient beings, so that sentient beings may use the methods to cure themselves of 84,000 habits and faults, which include greed, hatred, ignorance, and desire. □

FINALLY:
Watching my Mother die slowly,
suffering greatly,
I longed to help, but realized
my own inability, my limits
for the very first time,
leaning over her, kissing her cheek
patting her frail hand, while
she too weak to speak words, used
her eyes to speak volumes,
in them I read her hopes, regrets, and fears,
in the whole world all I wanted was
to be able to comfort her now, when she
needed me, and comforting most,
and in this time of need, I was powerless,
Ours hadn't been a religious family
I never learned how to pray, didn't know how to,
I had never even tried,
but now I understood what it was all about
this power, greater than ourselves
I understood, and as though it were
something I had done all my life,
I felt my heart open, and all the pain
of an entire life begin to flow out,
And I felt love enter there and it filled me up,
I felt comfort flow through me
and for the very first time,
I talked to God,
I held my Mother's weak body
against my own
and allowed the sense of calm and peace
to flow through us both.

Sarah Elizabeth Rose's mother died in 1989. She lives in rural Oregon where she is raising three small children.

Tom Dunham

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